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## Feeling the Environment: Aesthetic Interestedness and Environmental Aesthetics

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### Abstract

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Can aesthetic disinterest represent an adequate strategy to develop a sustainable attitude? While aesthetic disinterest plays a basic role in the Kantian foundation of aesthetics, (dis)interestedness has been a puzzling topic of discussion in the debate on environmental aesthetics and is becoming an increasingly pressing one, given the current worsening of the climate crisis.

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The first part of this paper will explore the different meanings of the term as it is used within the debate on environmental aesthetics, either in support of or against the adoption of a disinterested attitude toward the environment. I will suggest drawing a distinction between an ontological meaning of aesthetic interest and the idea of engagement as fully embodied and embedded perception, which is to say between a strong and a weak conception of aesthetic engagement within the debate.

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In the second part, I will defend two claims: firstly, the term 'interest' has many meanings, including not only negative meanings—primarily self-interest and instrumentalism—but also positive ones—being involved and engaged in something, taking care of and feeling responsible for something. Hence, we should distinguish between different interests at stake, instead of assuming a (quasi)transcendental point of view, conceived of as allegedly immune to any interest. Secondly, we should develop an anthropological theory of interest, by connecting it to a conception of sensibility as the constitutive exposure to an environment characterizing organic beings, and by taking into account the feedback actions on human interests elicited by the specific linguistic-cultural structure of the human niche.

### **Key Words**

aesthetic disinterestedness; aesthetic engagement; ecological crisis; environmental aesthetics; theory of interest

## **1. Introduction**

Can environmental aesthetics contribute to the development of a sustainable attitude toward the environment? If so, how?

At the beginning of the new millennium, with the worsening of the ecological crisis, this issue became an increasingly pressing one within the debate on environmental aesthetics, although the discipline at first did not focus on the deterioration of the environmental situation; at least at an explicit level, it primarily arose as a reaction to the neglect of natural beauty within the analytical philosophy of art, which is to say as an attempt to explore the possibilities of a new aesthetics of nature.[1] The issue has been formulated in a variety of ways: can contemporary environmental aesthetics meet the needs of environmentalism, by contributing to the preservation and conservation of the natural environment?[2] Can the aesthetic values of nature play a significant role in environmental policy debates?[3]

My focus in this paper is on a more specific issue: can the concept of aesthetic disinterestedness, which was coined by traditional aesthetics as the distinctive feature of aesthetic experience, represent an adequate strategy to develop a sustainable attitude?

Evidently, the very concept of disinterestedness is problematic for dealing with the current environmental emergency, insofar as it has been conceived as the hallmark of the aesthetic realm. In a nutshell, the problem can be summarized as follows: if aesthetic experience basically consists in *disinterested contemplation*, what can be said about preserving the planet from such an aesthetic point of view? And more practically, what can or could such an aesthetic accomplish?

When looking at the history of the concept,[4] the problem seems to be structural. According to Jerome Stolnitz, the concept of aesthetic disinterestedness arose in the context of eighteenth-century British aesthetics, involving an anti-instrumentalist attitude shaped by a neo-Platonic approach: beauty should be an object of pure contemplation irrespective of any practical consequences it might have.[5] Although Stolnitz's claim has been called into question in relation to his emphasis on eighteenth-century British aesthetics,[6] it cannot be denied that even in Kant's foundation of aesthetics the beautiful is characterized as involving a non-instrumental attitude, namely through the denial of any practical goals. In his third *Critique*, the non-instrumental, anti-practical conception of beauty is combined with the concept of disinterested pleasure in order to break the continuity between the pleasurable and the beautiful that was still present in Edmund Burke's aesthetics.[7] Disinterestedness is introduced in order to mark an *a priori* difference, or difference of *principle*, between the beautiful and the pleasant, in addition to between the beautiful and the good.[8] In Kant's view, we can legitimately aspire to universally share the feeling of pleasure deriving from a beautiful thing, precisely because subjects formulating a pure judgment of taste are disinterested: they are both indifferent to the existence of the beautiful object and lack any concept of the object that could work as an incentive for action.[9] Importantly for the issue at stake in environmental aesthetics, Kant identifies the paradigm of "free beauty" in natural beauty, rather than in artistic beauty, and consequently endorses the view of the aesthetic experience of nature as purely contemplative. [10]

Of course, there is a possible alternative solution à la Adorno when it comes to interpreting the role of aesthetic disinterestedness with reference to the current ecological crisis. The core idea is that it is only by considering nature

contemplatively, that is, apart from any interest (basically understood as self-interest) that we can resist the ideology based upon exploiting the environment and reaping profit from its resources. Any kind of interested attitude, even preservative actions to mitigate damage, would confirm a reifying conception of nature and existing capitalistic dynamics, if only unintentionally.

But can mere resistance represent a successful way of solving the problems of climate change and promoting more sustainable choices among people? Or does mere resistance give free rein to the economic exploitation of natural resources and political *laissez-faire*?[11]

My suggestion here is that environmental aesthetics has provided an important contribution to this issue primarily by developing a debate on disinterest and engagement in the aesthetic experience of nature. Hence, in the first part of my article, I am going to draw a succinct picture of some main positions in the debate (Berleant, Carlson, Brady) and the meanings of the terms that have been discussed. I will do so by highlighting the difference between (1) an ontological interpretation of engagement which considers humans to be an integral part of the natural world and (2) a second use of the term 'engagement,' signifying a radically embodied, fully integrated, and active perception of nature. I will also sketch out the arguments adduced by different scholars in support of or against the adoption of a disinterested attitude toward the environment—from preserving nature's otherness and avoiding hedonism, and the instrumental exploitation of the environment, to taking into account living beings' structural embeddedness and situatedness in their environment. In the end, different positions have been converging, I believe, on the idea of active and fully embodied engagement as a feature of the aesthetic experience of the environment. But is this enough?

In the second part of my paper, I'm going to defend a stronger thesis, namely that this convergence on *engagement* is not sufficient: in order to tackle the ecological crisis, we need to focus on the very concept of *interest* in experiencing the natural and naturally social environment; more specifically, we need to investigate its structural connections with both organic and cultural sensibility. On the one hand, it is necessary to consider the fact that 'interest' has many meanings, not only negative meanings —primarily self-interest and instrumentalism –

but also positive ones—being involved and engaged in something, taking care of and feeling responsible for something. Hence, we should distinguish between different interests at stake, instead of assuming a (quasi)transcendental point of view, conceived of as allegedly immune to any interest. On the other hand, I believe that what is required is an anthropological account of interest that connects it to a conception of sensibility focused on the constitutive exposition to an environment as a basic feature characterizing organic beings. This also means taking into account the feedback actions on human interests elicited by the specific linguistic-cultural structure of the human niche. Finally, I suggest considering so-called aesthetic experiences of the environment as peculiar episodes in the continuum of a feeling of the environment that can vary in intensity, but represents a permanent feature of organic life insofar as this depends on what happens around it. In particular, enhanced aesthetic experiences of the environment can provide the chance to redirect previous interests, expand limited interests, and share a sense of commonality with nonhuman features of the environment.

## **2. Mapping the debate**

Since the inception of the discipline, environmental authors have emphasized that the experience of nature requires a disruption of the standard representational model of the relation between the observer and the object. Roland Hepburn spoke of the “mutual *involvement* of spectator and object” when experiencing a natural context, thereby contrasting it with the alleged physical *detachment* characterizing the aesthetic experience of framed, isolated artistic objects.[12] Later, Allen Carlson criticized both the “object model” and the “landscape model” of aesthetic appreciation as inappropriate for nature, insofar as both are grounded in a frontal conception of the relationship between the observer and the observed object, whereas in order to aesthetically appreciate a wood, for example, one should enter it and experience it from within.[13] However, in the case of neither of these two scholars does the claim in question lead to a problematization of aesthetic disinterestedness, whose alleged validity remains untouched. It was Arnold Berleant who provided the first explicit and coherent criticism of this paradigm, containing both a *pars destruens* and a *pars construens*. Berleant’s claim, however, did not originally spring from an aesthetics of nature; rather, it was advanced with reference to the

experience of art and involved a criticism of those dogmas that, according to the American scholar, have shaped the modern philosophy of art. In his view, disinterested attention has been erroneously identified as the proper kind of distinctive experience required by artworks, insofar as they are considered ontologically *sui generis* objects that should be experienced *per se* or intrinsically for no further purposes.

Disinterestedness, Berleant states, began to emerge as the mark of a new and distinctive mode of experience called 'aesthetic,' a kind of awareness distinct from more commonly recognized alternative modes, such as instrumental, cognitive, moral, and religious experiences. [14]

By contrast, Berleant argues, our experience of the arts, and not only of contemporary artworks, implies a sort of embedment: for instance, the embedment of the reader in the reading of the novel, or a sort of active participation of the observer walking around and at least imaginatively touching a Brancusi sculpture. As he says in "Beyond Disinterestedness," [15] passive or inert contemplation is unconvincing as a feature of artistic experience both because, on the one hand, artistic production requires practical activity and, on the other hand, artistic appreciation is supported by actions such as moving around a sculpture, moving away or getting closer to a painting, and so on. As already emphasized by John Dewey, [16] Berleant claims that the contemplative model of distance, separation, and passive attention has grown out of a misleading analogy between aesthetic and cognitive experience, apparently requiring an inert attention to their objects and the lack of any practical concerns. In a nutshell, the contemplative theory of aesthetic appreciation is seen as a consequence of the intellectualist tradition—it is not grounded in the way in which the arts are produced and experienced.

As an alternative to the Kantian paradigm, Berlant endorses an aesthetic of engagement, constituting the *pars construens* of his proposal. In his view, aesthetic engagement involves "perceptual unity," which brings the perceiver and the object together beyond any form of dualism and is characterized by three features: (1) the continuity of art practices and objects with all other human activities; (2) a perceptual unity joining the perceiver and the perceived object and/or situation—and this also means

synesthesia, namely a fusion of the various sensory modalities; and (3) finally, aesthetic engagement implies participation, namely the mutual involvement of perceiver and object.[17]

To sum up, I believe one can distinguish at least three meanings of the words 'interest' and 'engagement,' as they are used by Berleant.[18] Firstly, *disinterestedness* is conceived of as a marker of alleged artistic autonomy, but there is no explicit use of the word 'interest' as a positive term for characterizing the experience of the arts. Secondly, there is the idea of *aesthetic engagement*, understood at the perceptual and experiential level: the experience of the arts and of artistic objects, according to Berleant, requires a fully embodied, dynamically structured, and actively participated form of experiencing, including forms of synaesthesia and the full integration (as opposed to mere association) of sensory, affective, and imaginative aspects. Thirdly, the notion of *aesthetic engagement* seems to involve a stronger ontological claim: there is no dualism between subject and object, no separation between them, but rather a mutual involvement and belonging to the same field (according to Berleant's phenomenological ascendancy) or a common environment (according to his Deweyan roots).[19] Consequently, the relationship at stake is not representational or frontal and the concept of aesthetic engagement involves a criticism of the dualistic view of humans as separate from the natural world. Instead, there is mutual reciprocity between the perceiver and the perceived situation, in addition to their belonging to a shared common environment. As I understand it, this last point is the most radical one made by Berleant, which potentially has the most striking consequences for the aesthetics of the environment. In the book bearing this title,[20] Berleant explicitly supports a view of the environment as an integral part of human beings because it enters into their physical, social, and cultural constitution. In turn, human beings are seen as part of the environment insofar as they contribute to modifying it from within, as originally stated by Dewey. Consequently, there is no "external world," but rather a "complex network of relationships," of which humans are part. Hence, the claim is a radical one, implying a paradigm shift from Cartesian or even Kantian subject/object dualism to an ecological paradigm whereby organisms are seen as interacting with the multiplicity of factors that constitute the environment and their own lives.

The consequences might be important even on the broader ethical and/or political level, because ontological continuity between humans and their environment, namely humans' inclusion in the environment, could represent a third alternative, different from the idea of nature as an object that risks being exploited by capitalist economy and as an object that should only be contemplated from a distance, in order to preserve it from manipulation and abuse, as we will see in the next section.

Reacting against Berleant's proposal, Allen Carlson recognized that while the aesthetic appreciation of a work of art and, even more so, of a natural environment requires a form of active participation, this does not imply a rejection of disinterestedness as a feature of aesthetic experience. In Carlson's view, on the contrary, disinterestedness must be maintained because of its foundational role in defining aesthetics and its autonomy from other disciplines.[21] However, it is to Emily Brady that we owe a clearer strategy for maintaining aesthetic disinterest along with aesthetic engagement, as well as an articulate exposition of the reasons for preserving a disinterested experience of nature.[22] In a nutshell, she acknowledges that aesthetic appreciation implies a form of engagement understood as active participation by providing a weak or more cautious interpretation of engagement. I would label her view of aesthetic engagement as more moderate than Berleant's, both because she rejects a continuistic framework from the ontological point of view and basically maintains the subject/object distinction and because she regards the "active contemplation" of nature as involving multisensory perceptions together with the imagination, rather than synaesthesia considered as a primitive phenomenon.

But why should aesthetic engagement coexist with disinterest? This is the point, I believe, where the Kantian roots of Emily Brady's aesthetics become most evident. Brady lists a series of good reasons for supporting a disinterested appreciation of nature: disinterestedness is necessary to avoid selfish dispositions (where interest is taken to be synonymous with self-interest), to respect nature in itself and its intrinsic value, to avoid its reduction to the needs and desires of the subject, and to escape anthropocentrism. The main reasons are to avoid hedonism, namely a view of the aesthetic appreciation of nature as a means to attain pleasure and to prevent utilitarianism, and namely an assumption of nature as a



means to pursue a practical goal.[23] Consequently, Brady's concern is faithful to Kant's concern about establishing a distinction of principle between the beautiful, the pleasurable and the good. On closer inspection, this claim is also faithful to Kant insofar as the distinction between the beautiful and the pleasurable is at least partially guided by a moral intention—namely, to preserve nature from selfish human interests—and not merely established as a means to guarantee the universal intersubjective validity of judgments of taste. In other words, the autonomistic request to define the aesthetic domain per se solely on the basis of disinterest, that is, independently of ethical criteria, fails to achieve its goal, because this need is still at least partly driven by ethical reasons, as Gadamer had already emphasized in relation to Kant.[24] And perhaps this is a good thing, I would argue, especially for an aesthetic that has to cope with an environmental crisis.

In the following years, Emily Brady's approach would appear to have developed, at least partially, in the direction of an explicit integration, if not continuity, between aesthetic and moral values, and also beyond the dualism between subject and object.[25] While she had initially supported a non-instrumental view of nature as having an intrinsic, non-anthropocentric value, she later provided even pragmatic arguments to support environmental protection. In her more recent works, she considers that people can develop "caring attitudes" toward nature and the environment via their aesthetic appreciation, insofar as the appreciation of natural environments can contribute to cultivating ethical dispositions toward them.[26] At the same time, she notes, "deeper engagements with the environment through activities more or less aesthetically motivated offer the potential of care for nature as well as caring for ourselves."[27] In other words, practices involving strong aesthetic components, such as gardening or hiking in the mountains, can provide relief and enhance individuals' well-being. To sum up, enjoying nature both nourishes attention and caring attitudes toward the environment and, at the same time, can be an effective practice for caring for and healing people.

But what is caring and being cared for if not a form of concern and proactive interest, albeit not always a positive one?[28] More generally, my question is: can sensibility

toward the environment really be disinterested? This is the issue I am going to deal with in the next section.

### **3. The return of aesthetic interest**

Briefly put, on the one hand, it seems that different positions have been converging on the idea that the aesthetic experience of the environment is scaffolded by a fully embodied and active engagement with the ecological contexts in which appreciation occurs. On the other hand, the emphasis on aesthetic autonomy or relative independence has grown weaker, probably also because of the worsening environmental crisis and the urgency of the problems.

However, in what follows I'm going to argue that this convergence on *engagement* is not enough: my hypothesis is that we need to consider interestedness a feature of sensibility and focus on the potential consequences of this view for the development of a more sustainable attitude.

My suggestion here is twofold, even though this is only a first sketch of a broader account of interest in a philosophical and anthropological perspective.[29]

A first point to make is that the word 'interest' has a cluster of meanings, not only negative meanings but even positive ones, such as bodily engagement, active concern, taking care of others or being cared for, and feeling responsible for something or someone. Personally, I am open-minded even with regard to instrumentalism, provided we assume a non-dichotomist conception of means and ends—meaning the view that means are constitutive of their ends, as argued by Dewey and the Pragmatists.[30] Similarly, I tend to adopt a tolerant view of hedonism, provided that we distinguish between different kinds and ranges of pleasure instead of uncritically assuming asceticism to be the best moral option.[31] For example, we should distinguish between private pleasures, shareable or shared enjoyment, fruitful or regressive forms of satisfaction applied to the immediate surroundings and also to the most diverse contexts. Hence, we should discriminate between different interests at stake, instead of invoking a (quasi)transcendental disinterested attitude, as if it were possible for living organisms to have no concerns for the environmental conditions on which their lives depend. I believe that discerning the different interests at stake should be a crucial point for environmental issues, considering, for

example, that an aesthetic view of a natural or urban environment can reflect an elitist position, disrespectful of the needs and desires of the people living in that context. Certainly, we run the risk of assuming ethnocentric and anthropocentric views in appreciating or devaluing natural and more civilized environments, but this risk could be avoided precisely by taking into account the possibly divergent concerns of other people and different forms of life. Developing a sort of multi-sided approach that is attentive to the variety of interests entangled in our interactions with the environment is a valid alternative to an allegedly disinterested attitude.

On the other hand, I believe we should develop an account of the relationship between interest and sensibility. It may be recalled that at the very dawn of the discipline, philosophical aesthetics primarily focused on sensibility rather than art. Alexander Baumgarten argued for a relative independence of sensibility, understood as a peculiar form of knowledge, capable of grasping “particulars *qua talis*”[32] that cannot be caught through the coarser mesh of concepts. Nonetheless, as argued by Herbert Marcuse, sensibility was still understood as a form of cognition based on the senses,[33] rather than as sensuality or as a fully embodied and embedded engagement with things, people, and events laden with affects, desires, needs and, I suggest, interests. Drawing upon cultural naturalism as defined by John Dewey,[34] I believe it is more fruitful for an aesthetics of the environment to adopt a conception of sensibility as basically connected with life rather than with cognition. If we focus on human sensibility from the perspective of organic life in an environment, we can see sensibility as a form of exposure, vulnerability, or passivity on the part of the organism whose very life, survival, and possibility to flourish depend on the environment entering its own constitution in a variety of ways—from nourishment, oxygen, and heat to pollution, viruses, and war. On the other hand, sensibility includes a form of orientation, selectivity, and discrimination that amounts to a more active disposition toward the different features of the environment, including the organism itself, rooted in a wide range of interests and habits that are both organic and environmental.[35] Against this background, we can locate a first broadly “biological”[36] meaning of interest or, I would suggest, an “ecological” meaning: life is always *interested* in living conditions because it is already *situated*

in an environment from which it depends and *tends* to find some sort of dynamical and possibly favorable equilibrium — a form of rhythm—with the environment to which it is tied. Insofar we are organisms living in an environment, “we are always biased beings, tending in one direction rather than another,”[37] we always implicitly prefer some features of the environment and reject, or simply neglect, others. We feel our surroundings to be either welcoming, in which case we try to enhance our bond with them, or to be noxious, in which case we tend to move away from them; we feel people as friends and tend to stay with them as much as possible, or we perceive them as strangers, or even enemies, and tend to reject them, to escape or fight against them. Dewey further explains that an explicit choice does not emerge out of indifference, that is: it does not arise out of a mere neutral, disinterested picture of what is there, since “it is the emergence of a unified preference out of competing preferences.”[38] To wrap this point up, if only in a very sketchy way, this means that sensibility is always interested in environmental circumstances, in one way or another. In other words, when it comes to environmental conditions, be they material or cultural, and the kind of relationships we have with them, interestedness is an original feature pervading living beings’ experience of the world and it is *aesthetically* shaped, meaning that it has to do with how we *feel* the environment with reference to our lives: interestedness is connected with our longings, refusals, and desires.[39]

Furthermore, given that the environment is being increasingly modified by human actions and choices, we should consider the fact that our material and cultural practices have a loop effect on how we feel the environment itself.[40] More specifically, I would argue that we need to take into account how primarily organic interests, needs, and desires are reconfigured within the specific linguistic-cultural structure of the human niche. [41] In other words, we need to focus on the ways in which (more or less involved) human feelings about the environment are shaped not only by material conditions but also through shared practices and cultural and linguistic habits. In this regard, the wide range of meanings of ‘interest’ considered in the previous section could be seen as a feature characterizing the human form of life, where the organic interestedness which humans share with other animals, while being basically felt rather than cognized, appears to be constantly reshaped through

the naturally cultural and enlanguaged environment they inhabit.

This kind of approach does not involve a form of anthropocentrism, if by this term one understands a normative claim about an alleged human superiority over other species. Rather, this is an anthropocentric view insofar as it explicitly assumes that each inquiry inevitably starts from the specific conditions of life, anchored in the physiology of each organism, in the specific relationships it has with the environment it is embedded in and on which it depends. Considering Ben Mylius' clarification of the different meanings of anthropocentrism with reference to environmental philosophy, I would state that this form of anthropocentrism could be defined as a "perceptual" or "primordial" type of anthropocentrism, by assuming a broad view of perception.[42] In a nutshell, the point is that, given life's constitutive dependence on an environment, every interaction, be it practical or intellectual, starts from the entangled situation a living being is embedded in and does not occur in an alleged neutral void. One can change position and should possibly try to adopt alternative positions and search for other ways of resolving certain tensions, but this is not a mere intellectual game: it has to do with how the environment affects one's life. By focusing on the pervasive aesthetic interests of living beings when it comes to their living conditions and particularly on the forms that such interests take among humans, philosophical inquiry can explicitly acknowledge the conditionings from which it arises, instead of evoking a quasi-transcendental attitude devoid of any interest.

#### **4. Conclusions**

In this paper, I began by addressing the issue of whether aesthetic *disinterest*, given its crucial role in the foundation of aesthetics, represents an adequate strategy to develop a sustainable attitude. This is a pressing problem, given that the ecological crisis is evidently accompanied by serious *concerns* about the health of the planet, requires systematic forms of *engagement* to reverse or at least mitigate the consequences of human actions on the environment, and forces us to *take a clear stance*, both theoretically and practically, with regard to what is currently happening. The very formulation of the issue shows that different meanings of interest lie at the core of the problem: not only self-interest but also positive forms

of interest —active concern, moral engagement, stance-taking, feeling responsible for and taking care of others, and so on.

Within so-called environmental aesthetics, there are supporters of a disinterested attitude toward nature as a bulwark against instrumental and hedonistic approaches, and people like Berleant, who overtly defend an aesthetics of engagement. Within the debate, two main ideas have been put forward in relation to this issue: on the one hand, the idea of engagement as fully embodied and embedded perception—and this idea is expressed sometimes in moderate terms, sometimes in stronger ones; on the other side, the ontological meaning of the term, which concerns the continuity between humans and the natural world.

Building on this ontological view of engagement, I suggested integrating it through an anthropological interpretation of interestedness as a permanent feature of sensibility. Insofar as humans are living beings whose lives are constituted through their interactions with the environment, we need to acknowledge that we always feel the environment to a greater or lesser extent from a particular angle, and also with a natural tendency to establish a possibly favorable equilibrium with environmental conditions. Natural and social surroundings are always felt in one way or another, even though there are differences in degree, and this feeling toward the world around us is evidently stronger in situations of crisis.

Consequently, I suggest that what environmental philosophers define as aesthetic experiences of the environment can be considered to be enhanced, more attentive interactions with the environment, single episodes standing out in the continuum of experience—they are “an experience,” in the sense defined by Dewey. [43] They may be characterized by a peculiarly satisfying rhythm,[44] as happens when we are walking along the shore in the early hours of a summer day; or they may involve resistance to the establishment of a good dynamical interaction with environmental conditions, as occurs when we come into contact with the degradation of certain urban areas. Far from being disinterested, such experiences can lead to a shift in previous interests and can give rise to new interests. They can transform our feelings about the environment, shifting them from a silent state to a more conscious one; they can nourish our sense of belonging to a wider world or intensify our sense of

precariousness and exposure to perilous conditions. Sometimes, they can guide us toward a more sustainable attitude, nourishing more shareable interests and enhancing our sense of participating in a shared destiny with the environment to which we belong.

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## **Endnotes**

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[1] Ronald W. Hepburn, "Contemporary Aesthetics and the Neglect of Natural Beauty," in *British Analytical Philosophy*, eds. Bernard Williams and Allan Montefiore (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966).

[2] Allen Carlson, "Contemporary Environmental Aesthetics and the Requirements of Environmentalism," *JTLA (Journal of the Faculty of Letters, The University of Tokyo, Aesthetics)*, 34 (2009): 1-21.

[3] Emily Brady, "Aesthetics in Practice: Valuing the Natural World," *Environmental Values*, 15 (2006): 277-291.

[4] For a concise overview of the debate on the subject, see my entry, "Aesthetic Disinterest" (*International Lexicon of Aesthetics*, Spring 2023 Edition, <https://lexicon.mimesisjournals.com/archive/2023/spring/AestheticDisinterest.pdf>).

[5] Jerome Stolnitz, "On the Origins of "Aesthetic Disinterestedness," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 20/2 (1962): 131-143.

[6] Miles Rind, "The Concept of Disinterestedness in Eighteenth-Century British Aesthetics," *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 40/1 (2002), 67-87.

[7] Bart Vandenabeele, "Beauty, Disinterested Pleasure, and Universal Communicability: Kant's Response to Burke," *Kant-Studien*, 103/2 (2012): 207-233.

[8] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), §§ 2-5.

[9] Paul Guyer, "Disinterestedness and Desire in Kant's Aesthetics," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 36/4 (1978), 449-460.

[10] Kant, §. 16. Apart from the main topics of this paper, it must be noted that Kant uses the concepts of interest and disinterest in a variety of ways in his work (cf. Robert Clewis, "Interest," in Julian Wuerth (ed.), *The Cambridge Kant Lexicon*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021). Consequently, his treatment of disinterest has long been debated (for a brief survey, see Roberta Dreon, "Aesthetic Disinterest," in *International Lexicon of Aesthetics*, Milan: Mimesis, Spring 2023 Edition). Particularly important for the idea of interest as active participation in nature that will be emphasized in the second part of this paper is the distinction provided by Kant in sections 41 and 42 of his third *Critique*. Here, he draws the famous distinction between interest as the cause of an empirical judgement of taste and interest as the output of a pure judgment of taste. If a judgment triggers an immediate interest in natural beauty, it has moral significance according to Kant, because it shows that the object that we consider beautiful (nature, in this case) must be the "end" and not the "means" of our relationship with it: something is beautiful not because it produces pleasure in me or because it is helpful to me, but because it enhances my vital feelings and produces an exaltation of my vital faculties, revealing nature's ultimate finality.



[11] Cf. John Dewey, "Individualism Old and New," in LW, Vol. 5 (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), 41-123.

[12] Hepburn, "Contemporary Aesthetics," 12-13, the italics are mine.

[13] Allen Carlson, "Appreciation and the Natural Environment," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 37 (1979): 267-276.

[14] Arnold Berleant, *Art and Engagement* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1991), 12.

[15] Arnold Berleant, "Beyond Disinterestedness," *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 34/3 (1994): 242-254.

[16] John Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, LW, Vol.1 (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), Ch. 9.

[17] Berleant, *Art and Engagement*, 46-48.

[18] For an overview of Berleant's conception of disinterest and aesthetic engagement, see also Cheryl Foster's paper in the *Contemporary Aesthetics* special volume (2021) devoted to his work.

[19] The phenomenological roots of Berleant's conception of aesthetic engagement are stronger in his book on the aesthetic field (Berleant 1970), while the influence of John Dewey's philosophy is more evident in his volume on the aesthetics of the environment (Berleant 1992). It is worth mentioning that Berleant devoted his PhD. dissertation to Dewey's thought, particularly the relation between logic and social doctrine.

[20] Arnold Berleant, *The Aesthetics of Environment* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1992).

[21] Allen Carlson, "Aesthetic and Engagement," *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 33/3 (1993): 220-227.

[22] Emily Brady, "Don't Eat the Daisies: Disinterestedness and the Situated Aesthetic," *Environmental Values*, 7 (1998): 97-114; Emily Brady, *Aesthetics of the Natural Environment* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003).

[23] Brady, "Don't Eat the Daisies," 97-114.

[24] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1982), 44.

[25] Emily Brady, "Aesthetics in Practice: Valuing the Natural World," *Environmental Values*, 15 (2006): 277-291 and Emily Brady, "Learning from Aesthetics of Engagement," *Popular Inquiry*, 1 (2022): 34-39.

[26] Brady, "Aesthetics in Practice," 281-282.

[27] *Ibid.*, 289.

[28] For example, taking care of one's own garden can be a regressive practice in the case of using pesticides to protect roses from disease, while disregarding the consequences of this choice for a broader area, as well as for public health.

[29] I have tried to develop some contributions to a philosophical anthropology in a pragmatist perspective in my volume, *Human Landscapes* (New York: SUNY, 2022).

[30] Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, Ch. 4.

[31] On this point, it is still worth considering Nietzsche's criticism of aesthetic disinterest as a paradigmatic ascetic value in his book, *On the Genealogy of Morality* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998).

[32] Leonard Wessell, "Alexander Baumgarten's Contribution to the Development of Aesthetics," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 30/3 (Spring, 1972), 333-342.

[33] Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955).

[34] John Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, LW, Vol.12 (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), 28.

[35] I have developed a more detailed account of sensibility from a pragmatist/naturalist point of view in *Human Landscapes*, esp. Chapter II, § 4 (Dreon, "Aesthetic Disinterest," 50 and ff).

[36] Matteo Santarelli, *La vita interessata. Una proposta teorica a partire da John Dewey* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2019), 55.

[37] John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, MW, Vol.14 (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), 134.

[38] *Ibid.*

[39] William James, *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976), 69.

[40] Dreon, "Aesthetic Disinterest," 143 and ff.

[41] Chris Sinha, "Language as a Biocultural Niche and Social Institution," in *New Directions in Cognitive Linguistics*, eds. Vyvyan Evans, Stéphanie Pourcel (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2009), 289-309.

[42] Ben Mylius, "Three Types of Anthropocentrism," *Environmental Philosophy*, 15/2 (2019), 167.

[43] John Dewey, *Art as Experience*, LW, Vol.10 (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press 1989), Ch. 3.

[44] Carlos Vara Sanchez, "Enacting the Aesthetic: A Model for Raw Cognitive Dynamics," *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 21 (2021), 317-339.

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